Migration and Development:

An Insight into the Experiences and Perceptions of Skilled Migrants Involved in the MIDA Great Lakes Programme

Working Paper No 59

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March 2010

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Abstract

In recent years, debates about the three interconnected themes of the migration–development nexus – brain drain, remittances and diaspora – have been dominated by Northern academics and policy-makers. This paper gives voice to the migrants themselves, exploring their experiences and perceptions of skilled migration and its relationship with development. It is based on semi-structured interviews with thirteen skilled migrants from Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Rwanda who have emigrated to Belgium but participate in the development of their homeland with the support of the IOM MIDA Great Lakes programme. The main findings of the study relate to the complexity of the dynamics at work in the migration–development nexus; the centrality of conditions in home countries in shaping the developmental impact of migration – conditions in the host country also play a role, but to a lesser extent; and the inefficiency of coercive policies aiming at curtailing flows – as opposed to reactive policies aiming at accommodating them and maximising their impact. In any case, international migration remains a marginal factor in explaining development, which seems to be an essentially endogenous process.

Epigraphs

If you tell people you don't come to my country because you're from this or that country, that's against human rights. You can't force them to go back either. What you can do is to stabilise them where they are, not with discourses but with visible actions [...]. If there are sustainable projects that are able to end the ethnic and socio–cultural conflicts, people will remain. They will work for their country. This idea that there is a better world somewhere else, you have to transform it through concrete actions [...]. People who think like this, it's because of the situation they're living. A situation of despair where the horizons are closed financially, where there is no school for children, where there is no doctor when you're ill because they went abroad for training and they stayed... There is no worse situation than when the horizons are closed. It's like being told that you're going to die; if you know the day and the date, you're already dead [...]. How can this mentality be changed? Not by closing the borders. Look at how people come here: they get eaten by the sharks every day. But they don't stop coming, they still try. Everyone drowns, one remains, the following week he tries again. So you need to stop the despair which is the reason why he is doing it [...]. You need big projects. Ethical in their conception, honest in facts and objectives (interview 3).

Would you take Elio di Rupo[1] to send him back to Italy? What would he do in Italy? He has succeeded, he's the perfect example of success. Why would his children want to go back to Italy? He has everything. But take a Congolese professor who arrived in the 80s, who has a PhD. He's drinking on this square you can see over there. How can he not see himself as a foreigner? He's not told that he is a foreigner, he has Belgian papers. But is he really Belgian? Because he can see that all the people he has studied with are working, but he is not working. It's the failure of integration that pushes people to go back even where they don't want to go back [...]. People who have succeeded, who have jobs matching their qualifications, they tell you: 'yes, I can help, I can help the family, but for me things are working here, I'm here'. But

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[1] Elio di Rupo is the leader of the Francophone Socialist Party in Belgium and a former Minister in the Belgian federal government. His father emigrated from Italy to Belgium as a miner in the post-war years.

Introduction: The Migration–Development Nexus

In his foreword to Dambisa Moyo's pamphlet *Dead Aid* (2009), Niall Ferguson writes:

> It has long seemed to me problematic, and even a little embarrassing, that so much of the public debate about Africa's economic problems should be conducted by non-African white men [...]. The African discussion has been colonised as surely as the African continent was a century ago.

This remark certainly applies to the 'migration–development nexus' (Nyberg-Sørensen *et al.* 2002), understood as the particular sub-field of migration studies which is concerned with the impact of international migration on developing countries of origin.

Whereas migration used to be ignored or condemned in the development discourse, the theoretical debate has recently focused on the positive effects of migration on development (Bakewell 2008). This theoretical activity has been matched by considerable policy-making interest with a number of high-level UN initiatives and the multiplication of related development programmes. This debate has focused on 'three major interconnected themes: remittances; skilled migration and brain drain; and diaspora' (Skeldon 2008: 7).

The steady increase of remittance flows,[2] particularly when compared with other types of international financial transfers such as export income, FDI or ODA, has played a crucial role in their celebration as 'the new development finance' (Wimaladharma *et al.* 2004). Macro-economic studies establishing their poverty-reduction impact in the developing world (Adams and Page 2005) have also contributed to convert remittances into 'the new development mantra' (Kapur 2003). Development agencies and governments have therefore attempted to increase the amounts transferred and their

alleged developmental effects. The intensification of skilled migration has also contributed to the recent interest in the migration–development nexus: 'between 1990 and 2000, the percentage of skilled workers among immigrants [in OECD countries] increased by 4.8 percentage points (from 29.8 percent to 34.6 percent)', raising the stock of skilled migrants in OECD countries to 20.4 million (Docquier and Marfouk 2006: 168).[3] According to the World Bank, 'more than 20,000 African professionals leave the continent each year' and 'around one-third of the most qualified African nationals have settled outside their country of origin' (quoted in Davies 2007: 60). As a result, the idea that diasporas can be mobilised to mitigate the detrimental consequences of the phenomenon has gained increased currency. More generally, authors have called for a broader consideration of the role of diasporas, 'beyond remittances' (Newland and Patrick 2004). Since then, this theme has attracted considerable attention (Davies 2007; De Haas 2006; Ellerman 2006; Faist 2008; Ionescu 2006; Kapur and McHale 2005: 110-131; Kuznetsov 2006; OECD 2009; Orozco 2007).

These debates have essentially been based on restrictive approaches of both migration, reduced to international migration, and development, usually understood in terms of (gross) income indicators. Nevertheless, this economicist bias is increasingly questioned in the literature in favour of broader social or human development approaches based on Sen's (1999) concept of development as freedom (Castles and Delgado Wise 2008: 10; De Haas 2007: 1).

The MIDA Great Lakes Programme

The creation of the IOM Migration for Development in Africa (MIDA) programme in 2001 has to be replaced in this general context (IOM 2006; 2007). MIDA is 'a

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[2] Remittances were estimated at $305 billion in 2008 (Ratha and Mohapatra, 2009: 1). These figures do not include the large amounts transferred by migrants through informal channels.

[3] Reviews of both the extent of the phenomenon and its causes, in particular the intensified 'poaching' of talent by OECD countries, can be found in: Commander *et al.* (2004); Docquier and Marfouk (2006); Docquier and Rapoport (2007); Kapur and McHale (2005); Lucas (2005); OECD (2009).

demand driven capacity building programme' aiming at 'the mobilisation or transfer of knowledge, know-how or expertise, financial and other resources of Africans in the diaspora to meet the identified skills needs for development in African countries' (IOM 2007: 9).

Although MIDA builds on the expertise of previous IOM 'return and reintegration of qualified nationals' programmes implemented since the 1970s (Pires 1992), it differs from its precursors in that it offers 'more options than simply definitive return, as for example temporary returns, short consultancies and "virtual return", using existing technology for providing support to universities, schools and private companies' (IOM 2007: 15). Since its creation, the programme has been implemented in sixteen African countries with funding from a variety of donors including Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands, the UK and USA.

The MIDA Great Lakes programme, funded by Belgium, was created in 2001 'with the aim of reinforcing the institutional capacities of Burundi, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo by the mobilisation of their diasporas, and of mitigating the consequences of the brain drain' (IOM 2008: 2). The programme is now entering its fourth phase for 2009-2012. Although the programme has three components (physical, financial and virtual transfers), the key activity of the programme is the implementation of field missions by 'diaspora experts' in three priority sectors: education, rural development, and health. In total, 187 missions[4] were organised in the third phase of the programme (83 in the DRC, 60 in Rwanda, and 44 in Burundi). In this phase, the programme also included a small provision for the support of permanent return and 11 such returns were supported.[5]

Research Questions and Methodological Approach

As noted above, the migration and development debate, although casting migrants as 'heroes of development', has so far singularly ignored their voices and has been monopolised 'by Northern governments and by international agencies that they dominate' (Castles and Delgado Wise 2008: 3). In this respect, it has remained isolated from the recent thrust towards qualitative approaches, notably narrative and interviewing approaches, in the fields of population geography (Findlay and Graham 1991; Graham 1999; White and Jackson 1995) and migration studies (Halfacree and Boyle 1993; Lawson 2000; Silvey and Lawson 1999); such approaches have re-conceptualised migrants as 'interpretive subjects of their own mobility' (Silvey and Lawson 1999: 126).

The aim of this research project was therefore to use the MIDA Great Lakes programme as a case study to explore the subjective meanings and understandings that the participants held about their actions as agents of development and to confront them with the dominant discourses, based on the conviction that migrants are legitimate actors in the production of knowledge about themselves.

As the physical transfers component of the programme, which is the main focus of this research, specifically targets skilled migrants, a first set of research questions relates to the brain drain debate. What are the main causes of highly skilled migration? Does it hamper development in the source countries, and to what extent? How does the phenomenon interact with policies in home and host countries?

A second set of questions relates to the contributions 'diasporas' can make to development while abroad, through remittances and other forms of transnational engagement. What are the determinants and forms of transnational engagement? How is it influenced by types of migration, identificatory processes, conditions and policies in home and host countries?

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[4] This refers to the number of missions and not to the number of experts involved as many experts have carried out several missions.

[5] This element has been abandoned in the fourth phase.

Finally, the two epigraphs quoted at the beginning of this study essentially describe a world of closed horizons and limited options, both at origin and destination. A last set of questions therefore evolves around the degree of choice and freedom migrants enjoy in their decisions to move, settle, return or circulate, and the consequent impact on development.

The methodological approach selected, which relied on semi-structured interviews, aimed at exploring both participants' experiences (factual level) and their perceptions (meaning level) of skilled migration and its relationship with development (Kvale 1996: 29-32). The researcher also worked on the basis of documentation about the programme transmitted by IOM (in particular evaluation reports) and by the participants (CVs, MIDA mission reports, articles authored etc). Triangulation was ensured through phone interviews with the IOM office in Brussels and literature review. It had been originally envisioned to get in contact with the participants through IOM. Nevertheless, this was not possible due to constraints on the side of the organisation and issues of confidentiality. The author therefore made use of an annex of a recent evaluation report which contained a list of all the assignments carried out with the family names of the participants (IOM 2008).[6] This material was used as the basis of an internet search to identify potential participants and their contact details. A total of twenty-five valid e-mail addresses could be found, with the following results: ten persons did not reply, five were interested but unavailable at the time, and ten accepted to participate. The participants who replied also gave the researcher eight additional contacts of people willing to be interviewed. Due to time constraints, only three of those could be followed-up. The relatively high proportion of positive responses and the efficiency of the snowball

effect generated by the first contacts can be attributed to the interest awakened by the research topic among the participants: many interviewees considered that it was extremely important to take into account their experiences and perceptions of skilled migration and were eager to share them, as evidenced by the average length of the interviews (2.5 hours).

Although the author tried to ensure a balanced representation of countries of origin and sectors, the informal method used to generate the sample and its reduced size do not allow for generalisation and the study should be considered as a first exploration of the topic. A total of twelve interviews took place in different Belgian cities in July 2009.[7] One additional interview was held in France, in a small town close to Lille, with a Rwandan participant who had spent thirteen years in Belgium before moving to France.[8] Five participants were of Burundian origin; three of Congolese origin; and three of Rwandan origin, including two participants born and raised in the DRC. Eight participants were active in the education sector and five in the health sector.[9] Finally, one of the participants had returned 'permanently' with the support of MIDA and was visiting his family in Belgium, whereas the others were residing in Europe.

All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. Copies of the transcripts were circulated to the participants so that they could react to them if they wished. All interviews were conducted in French, and the quotes included in this dissertation have been translated by the researcher.

The remainder of this paper is divided into five parts. The next part presents the

[6] This list is only included on the French version of the evaluation report, which is accessible on the programme website (http://mida.belgium.iom.int/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogcategory&id=89&Itemid=173), not in the English version referenced in the bibliography.

[7] Interviews were held in Antwerp, Brussels, Ghent, Leuven, New Leuven or their close suburbs.

[8] Although this participant was included in the sample, this account will focus exclusively on Belgium when analysing conditions in host countries, as this case was marginal in our sample.

[9] The programme covers three sectors but this paper's focus has been restricted to the education and health sectors. This choice was dictated by the similarity of issues raised by these social sectors, as well as the fact that participants whose missions had been classified in the rural development sector had in fact conducted assignments as experts or professors in higher education institutions in their fields of expertise.

migration itineraries of the participants. The subsequent one focuses on the interplay between their identities and the conditions of their integration in Belgium, on the one side, and the forms of their transnational engagement, on the other side. The next two sections directly confront their analyses and perceptions, born out by their own experiences, with the key themes of the migration–development nexus: brain drain, remittances and diaspora engagement. The last part summarises the main findings and their policy implications.

Migration Intentions and Outcomes

In order to draw lessons from the experiences and perceptions of the skilled migrants involved in the MIDA Great Lakes programme, it is essential to understand the conditions of their movement. This section will explore what forces have influenced the participants' migration itineraries.

Burundi, the DRC and Rwanda: scope and patterns of migration to Belgium

A small minority of the immigrant population in Belgium

Sub-Saharan migration to Belgium is under-studied and often reduced to its Congolese[10] component (Kagné and Martiniello 2001: 5), partly due to its small share of the total immigration in the country. Two-thirds of foreigners in Belgium are EU nationals. Among the non-EU nationals, Moroccans and Turks are the biggest communities (80,579 and 39,419 nationals in 2006). The Congolese form the third group (14,216 nationals). Nevertheless, the number of naturalisations has been quite high in Belgium since the mid-1980s due to a series of liberal reforms. As a result, in 2006, foreigners represented 8.81 percent of the Belgian population, compared with 12.5 percent for foreign-born nationals. Thinking in terms of country of birth is even more relevant for non-EU immigrants since their naturalisation rates are higher: 54 percent of third country immigrants residing in Belgium had Belgian citizenship in 2006,

compared to 31 percent for EU immigrants (SPF Emploi, Travail et Concertation Sociale 2008: 12-18). According to the OECD, Belgium counted 3,743 Burundian immigrants (including 2,489 Belgians), 49,885 Congolese (39,824 Belgians) and 6,790 Rwandan (4,026 Belgians) in 2001.[11] Current OECD estimates evaluate the total immigrant population from these three countries at 75,000 individuals, representing 7 percent of the total immigrant population in Belgium (OECD 2008: 53).

An atypical migration

The history of the sub-Saharan African presence in Belgium is atypical (Kagné 2003: 218).[12] While Belgium heavily relied on foreign manpower recruited through interstate conventions during the *Trente Glorieuses*,[13] it never made use of its colonial ties with Central Africa for such purposes. The first sub-Saharan migrants to Belgium were students from Central Africa who came in the framework of cooperation agreements. After the independence of Congo (in 1960), Burundi and Rwanda (in 1962), such agreements were signed to support the education of nationals from the former colonies so that they could replace Belgians in the new States' administrations. Students from these countries also started arriving on scholarships from their own government.

Although this student migration was conceived as temporary, some of the students started to settle in the 1960s and 1970s, due to deteriorating conditions in their countries or origin. The number of sub-Saharan students grew up in the 1980s and 1990s, with an increasing variety of origins, reflecting the diversification of the sub-Saharan immigrant population at large. The

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[10] In this paper, the terms 'Congo' and 'Congolese' refer to the DRC.

[11] OECD database on immigrants and expatriates: http://www.oecd.org/document/51/0,3343,en_2649_339 31_34063091_1_1_1_1,00.html

[12] A general review of Belgian migration history can be found in OECD (2008: 50-54); Kagné (2003) and Kagné and Martiniello (2001) offer specific accounts of the history of sub-Saharan migration in Belgium.

[13] Between 1946 and 1969, such conventions were successively signed with Italy, Spain, Greece, Morocco, Turkey, Algeria and Tunisia.

patterns of migration also considerably evolved from the 1980s, with family reunification and asylum-seeking becoming major entry routes for sub-Saharan Africans in Belgium.

As far as the sub-Saharan student population is concerned, it presented the following characteristics in 1996-1997: the Congolese (1,757 students), the Cameroonese (595), the Burundians (159), the Rwandans (99), the Nigerians (99), and the Senegalese (70) were the biggest groups, representing 80 percent of the total (5,918). These students were overwhelmingly male (4,170 men and 1,748 women) and were overwhelmingly studying in the francophone universities (5,204) as opposed to the Flemish-speaking ones (714). Concerning the fields of studies, they were also increasingly diversified. The health sector was still dominant, but areas such as law and economics also attracted sub-Saharan students (Kagné and Martiniello 2001: 8-9; 21-23).

The majority: when 'temporary' migration becomes 'permanent'

Apart from one participant who arrived in Belgium as an asylum-seeker at the age of thirty-nine, all interviewees migrated to Belgium to complete advanced studies. While there is no doubt that student mobility does constitute 'a form of migration of the highly-skilled in its own right' and 'presents important opportunities to turn overseas education into more permanent forms of migration' (Lucas 2005: 129),[14] it is equally clear that 'permanent' emigration was not the initial goal of the participants. Most of them were already working in their country of origin and planned to return with the necessary skills to assume senior positions back home.

Nevertheless, at the time of the interviews, eleven out of the thirteen participants had been in Belgium for more than twelve years, confirming the adage that 'there is nothing more permanent than temporary migration'.

Interestingly, most participants insisted that it was not their choice to permanently reside in Belgium and that they would rather live in their own country, if they could secure a decent life there. Their narratives overwhelmingly emphasised push factors rather than pull factors. Only two participants referred to pull factors, having been offered opportunities as post-doctoral researchers upon completion of their PhDs.

The migration–asylum nexus

When analysing the trajectories of these people, it is crucial to keep in mind the recent history of the Great Lakes region. One of the participants – a Congolese of Rwandan origin who was living in North Kivu – arrived in Belgium as an asylum-seeker in 1994. Four other participants from Rwanda and Burundi, who initially came as students, had to request refugee status in the mid-1990s.[15] Several participants had lost family members and defined themselves as survivors of the genocide. Even for the Rwandans and Burundians who never asked for refugee status in Belgium, security concerns were often at the heart of the extension of their stay. The same applied to Congolese, with two of them having been directly confronted by conflict. Finally, several participants highlighted that their status as intellectuals constituted a threat for their security in countries where basic freedom of opinion did not exist.

Poor working conditions and the absence of financial and social recognition of skills in the home country also played a crucial role, as evidenced in the testimonies of two Burundian academics:

> The problem in underdeveloped countries is that not enough value is given to skilled people. Political elites often have limited education themselves. They're not interested in education and training, and they think that educated people can compete with them so they put them aside. There is no policy to promote people who have

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[14] See also OECD (2009: 83-89) and Vincent-Lancrin (2009) for recent reviews of the extent and patterns of student mobility.

[15] Focusing on the Burundian diaspora in Belgium, Turner (2007: 67-69) similarly emphasises the blurring of migration categories such as student, immigrant, refugee.

studied for 10 years after secondary school (interview 12).

> If I take the example of the health sector in Burundi, recently doctors were on strike, to the point that even the minimum service was eliminated. Can you imagine? Why? Doctors were saying, 'look: somebody who did not go to school, who is sitting in the National Assembly is making 2 millions, when I am making 200,000. This is not right' (interview 10).

The lack of equipment also constituted a serious obstacle to return in areas of expertise such as informatics, electronic engineering, chemistry, medical biology or genetics.

The narratives of these migrants therefore confirmed the blurring of the boundaries between economic and forced migration (Crisp 2003: 5-7) and the relevance of the notion of 'migration–asylum nexus' (Castles 2003: 17).

The 'myth of return'

Interestingly, although most participants were durably settled in their host country, they planned to spend their old days 'at home' and their narratives were deeply marked by the 'myth of return' (Anwar 1979). At first sight, their return project could be classified as a 'return of retirement' (Cerase 1974: 151; 257-258).[16] In line with the return migration literature,[17] their motivations related mainly to issues of social consideration and discrimination, as well as different forms of sociability and solidarity between European and African societies. Participants were extremely critical of some of the values underpinning Belgian society and saw old people's homes as the quintessence of individualism.[18] Only three participants did not *necessarily* see themselves returning upon retirement and

criticised this idealised vision of African societies.

The minority: contrasted experiences of return

Return of success or return of failure?

Three participants clearly did not fit with this majority pattern. One of them was a successful single Rwandan who completed a PhD in engineering in 2008 and was working as a post-doctoral researcher. Although fully satisfied with his integration in Belgium, he was actively preparing his permanent return to Rwanda, scheduled for January 2010. His aim was to integrate the higher education institution where he had carried out a MIDA assignment and foster its cooperation with his current institution in Belgium. His Belgian hierarchy supported the project and he was preparing a memorandum of understanding between the two institutions. He was strongly committed to the development of his country and ready to cope with the financial consequences of his decision. He emphasised that he had never intended to acquire Belgian citizenship nor lost sight of his initial objective to return. He was a perfect example of a 'return of innovation' (Cerase 1974: 251; 258-261).

Another participant, a Congolese from Kivu, presented a slightly more ambiguous case. He had completed a PhD in Economics and Management in 2008 and was working as a part-time assistant professor in a Belgian university. He had also taken two positions in Congo as director-general and visiting professor in two private universities in the DRC. His case differed from the previous one in that he was less integrated in Belgium and considered that he would definitely be better off in Congo. Moreover, although sharing the same level of commitment to his country – and more specifically region – of origin and having retained his Congolese citizenship, his permanent return was frustrated by the insecurity in Kivu, especially since he had a family in Belgium. As a result, his short-term plans were rather circulation between the two countries than return. His return

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[16] Cerase's typology applies to a very different context (mainly low-skilled returnees from the US to Italy in the 1960s), but certain elements can usefully be applied to our participants.

[17] See Ammassari and Black (2001: 17-24) for a literature review on return migration.

[18] Many sub-Saharan African migrants, particularly women, work as carers in such institutions in Belgium.

presented characteristics of both the 'return of innovation' and the 'return of conservatism' (Cerase 1974: 251; 254-257).

Finally, the sample included a Burundian academic who had returned 'permanently' since August 2008 as a professor in the newly established *Ecole Nationale d'Administration*. He had never been employed in Belgium despite completion of a PhD in political science in 2004 and a MA in communication in 2007. His 'permanent' return, which had been supported by MIDA, was largely a 'return of failure' (Cerase 1974: 249; 251-254) as he explained that he would have stayed in Belgium if he could have found a job. The fact that he acquired Belgian citizenship in 2006 was also a sign of his will to integrate himself in Belgium. Moreover, his Burundian salary was so low that he needed to complement it with positions as visiting professor in two private universities, a situation that was only sustainable because his wife held a good position as post-doctoral researcher in Belgium and could therefore support their three-children family. His return was unlikely to be 'permanent' as he continued to search for better opportunities in Belgium or other African countries.

The importance of life-cycle stages

The two interviewees who were more inclined to return during their working life were the youngest and those who had the shortest durations of stay in Belgium. In a study about Africans living in Wallonia, Gatugu *et al*. similarly found that the duration of stay negatively impacted the willingness to return to Africa for work (2001: 112). There seems to be a short period upon completion of studies during which return is a potential option. If it is frustrated (for instance for security reasons) and people start working in their host country, the probability that they will return during their working life drops sharply. The acquisition of relative financial comfort is usually linked with the creation or extension of a family, which then becomes an additional constraint on return. For the interviewees, supporting the education of their children in Belgium up to university level was a priority which prevented them from considering any short-term return. The 'permanent' returnee to Burundi stated:

> For the children, for their education, these people are going to stay. This is really the fundamental question for everyone. You come when you are twenty, but time passes, and you are forty. At forty, you have children who are at school. You came on your own or with someone else. Probably after five or six years, you are four. The decision to go back will affect four persons. It's always difficult to take such a decision when you have a family, when you have children (interview 3).

Transnational lives and blurred boundaries

In reality, the distinction between the majority and the minority profiles was not so neat. All participants who planned to return, whether in the short or the longer-term, intended to keep strong connections with Belgium through various forms of circulation linked to their professional careers or family situations. This is in line with the concept of 'revolving returnees' as 'circular migrants who apply a discourse on final and permanent return to the homeland, but who for a number of reasons don't return for good' (Hansen 2007: 132).

More generally, participants' experiences confirmed the relevance of the transnational approach, with transnationalism 'broadly [referring] to multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation–states' (Vertovec 1999: 447). In such a framework, clear-cut dichotomies such as emigration/immigration, origin/destination, or permanent/temporary/return migration are increasingly difficult to sustain (De Haas 2005: 1273; Faist 2008: 36-38).

Moreover, the distinction between 'return of retirement' and 'return of innovation' also needs to be qualified. Many participants expected to have limited pensions since they had started to work late (at least officially) and had gone through periods of part-time employment or unemployment.

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Issues of transferability also loomed large in their pension expectations. Moreover, they pointed out that they would still be 'young' at sixty-five – the official retirement age in Belgium – and that people usually worked much later in their home countries (not least because of the absence of pensions they could live on). As a result, many intended to be active 'pensioners' back home.

Gender considerations

The sample only included one woman, a Burundian nurse who had emigrated to Germany with a government scholarship and later relocated following her marriage with a Belgium-based Burundian. Female involvement is extremely marginal in the MIDA Great Lakes programme. Participants are usually former students who came to complete advanced studies with a scholarship from their government or the Belgian cooperation, and women represent a minority of this population. In the case of Rwanda for instance, they accounted for 26.9 percent of the higher education students on overseas government scholarships in 2001-2002 (World Bank 2004: 143).

According to Kagné and Martiniello, women represented 30 percent of students from sub-Saharan Africa in Belgium in 1996-1997 (2001: 9). Although female sub-Saharan immigration to Belgium is increasingly diverse, the dominant pattern has long been family reunification with a male student in Belgium (Kagné 2005: 23), a feature which was reflected in the sample, since only two participants had a spouse who emigrated separately for studies. Nevertheless, this does not imply that these women have low levels of qualification. Out of the eleven participants who gave information about their wives' profile, seven reported that they had tertiary education before emigrating to Belgium. Moreover, three out of the four spouses who did not have tertiary education before emigration enrolled in higher education in their host country. And several of those who already had tertiary education studied further in Belgium.

The proportion of women registered in the programme expert database (slightly less than 25 percent) is in line with the figures quoted above. Nevertheless, the proportion of women having effectively been involved in the programme is extremely low with nine missions out of a total of 187 carried out in the third phase of the programme (0.05 percent).[19] According to the female participant, this can be explained by role models and the family responsibilities assumed by women, which prevent them from carrying out assignments abroad.

In conclusion, the narratives of a majority of the participants emphasised a discrepancy between migration intentions and outcomes. Most of them were long-term settled in Belgium due to the impossibility to secure a decent life in their home countries. They nevertheless planned to return at the end of their working lives in Belgium. A minority – the youngest and those who had the shortest duration of stay in Belgium – was more inclined to return, highlighting the importance of life-cycle stages. Nevertheless, migration patterns were resistant to clear-cut dichotomies, demonstrating the relevance of a transnational approach. The sample also reflected the marginal involvement of women in the MIDA Great Lakes programme.

Identities, Integration and Transnational Engagement

One essential question about diaspora engagement relates to the way it is influenced by migrants' identities and the conditions of their stay in host countries. As noted in the previous section, the 'myth of return' strongly marked the narratives of most participants. At the same time, most interviewees were durably settled in Belgium and had taken Belgian nationality, which raises interesting identity questions. Similarly, the interplay between integration and exclusion dynamics in the host country, on the one side, and transnational engagement, on the other side, is worth

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[19] These nine missions had been implemented by five different women.

exploring to find out whether contradictory or concordant logics are at work. Nevertheless, migrants and diasporas are two different things. The concept of transnational engagement is therefore closer to the reality of their activities than the usual notion of diaspora engagement: all participants were transnationally engaged through the MIDA Great Lakes programme, but not all of them expressed a diasporic consciousness.

Identities

Migrants and diaspora: conceptual differences

The MIDA documentation uses expressions such as 'African migrants', 'African diasporas', 'overseas African experts' or 'overseas African community' indifferently (IOM 2006; 2007). While some of the national programmes, such as MIDA Italy–Ghana/Senegal are targeting diaspora associations, MIDA Great Lakes targets individual migrants who are problematically referred to as 'diaspora experts'.

This slippage between 'migrants as individuals' and 'diasporas as groups of migrants' is generalised in the migration–development nexus, yet there are important conceptual and theoretical differences between the two concepts (Mercer *et al.* 2008: 50-51). Brubaker proposes three main criteria as being constitutive of a diaspora: 'dispersion in space', 'orientation to a "homeland"' and 'boundary maintenance' (2005: 5-7). This section focuses on the last two in order to assess the level of diasporic consciousness of the participants.

Orientation to a homeland: diverse identificatory outcomes

*P*articipation in the MIDA Great Lakes programme indicates a high level of orientation to a homeland since experts are acting on a voluntary basis. For those who are satisfactorily employed in Belgium, MIDA missions, with their average duration of 55 days (IOM 2008: 11) have financial (unpaid leave) and family-life costs. In line with a recent evaluation report (IOM 2008: 26-27), participants mentioned their commitment to

the development of the homeland and their 'moral duty' as their central motivation, particularly when they had studied abroad on government scholarships. Eleven participants had carried out their mission in their country of origin. Out of the two remaining participants, one Congolese from Kivu made it clear that his intention was not to contribute to the development of Rwanda but to be close by his region of origin and his family on the other side of the border. The other one was the exception in the sample since he referred to a commitment to the development of Africa generally rather than his own country or region of origin.

The orientation to a homeland is also evidenced by the return intentions of the majority of the participants, who clearly '[regarded] the ancestral homeland as the true, ideal home and as the place to which one would (or should) eventually return' (Safran 1991: 83-84). Their narratives seemed to prove Clifford wrong on his condemnation of the 'teleology of return' (1994: 306). As Mercer *et al.* rightly point out, in certain cases, the theoretical perspective which emphasises the 'liberation from place' corresponds more to 'Western academic agendas than to words and actions of those in the [African] diaspora' (2008: 52). Moreover, and unsurprisingly for first-generation immigrants, all participants reported having close and regular contacts with their families back home through phone and e-mail communications and sending remittances. Eleven participants also reported travelling for holidays as often as their finances could allow.

More significantly, in terms of identity, all participants kept defining themselves according to their country or region of origin. Despite the fact that eleven interviewees had acquired Belgian citizenship, they referred to 'Belgians' as a different group. Their naturalisation was purely instrumental, aiming at reducing labour market discriminations, in line with the Belgian political discourse which promotes naturalisation as a fast track for integration (Kagné and Martiniello 2001: 28-30; Ouali

1998: 5-6). A Burundian interviewee explained:

> Let's be honest, it's more convenient, that's all. If I come to France and you offer me French citizenship, I'm taking it right away. As long as you give me a job. In Canada, I'm doing exactly the same. It's about stability, peace of mind, and avoiding the paperwork [...]. I took the citizenship because I wanted to be at peace and have more chances to find a job (interview 10).

The acquisition of Belgian citizenship was also viewed by many participants as a pre-requisite to engagement with their country of origin both in security (access to Belgian consular protection, possibility to come back to Belgium in case of troubles) and economic terms: Belgian citizenship offers an exit door to would-be returnees in case their project proves to be unsustainable and is somehow paradoxically seen as a pre-requisite for return, as pointed out elsewhere (Gatugu *et al*. 2001: 88-89; Hansen 2007).

While the orientation to a homeland was essential for interviewees, it took various forms of expression, individual or collective. Safran emphasises the collective dimension of diaspora identification, in relation both to the maintenance of memories or myths about the homeland and the commitment to its development (1991: 83-84). This collective dimension was significant only for a proportion of the interviewees, as evidenced for instance by their diverse degrees of involvement with diaspora associations: at the time of the study, four participants were not involved at all, three were attending certain events without being active members, and six were strongly involved and held responsibilities. The main reason for not being involved was the high level of political and ethnic divisions, attested in the literature (Kagné and Martiniello 2001: 39-40; Turner 2007). This fragmented and conflictual landscape is a recurrent feature of diaspora associational life (Mercer *et al*. 2008: 13; 58), especially when source countries are experiencing conflict or post-conflict phases.

Boundary-maintenance

According to Brubaker, boundary maintenance 'enables one to speak of a diaspora as a distinctive "community", held together by a distinctive, active solidarity, as well as by relatively dense social relationships, that cut across state boundaries and link members of the diaspora in different states into a single "transnational community"' (2005: 6). Again, participants' attitudes varied considerably. All married participants had a spouse from the same national origin. For those not married before emigrating, a common practice was to travel back to the country of origin on holidays to find a spouse. Most participants also admitted that they were socialising mainly within the diaspora. Nevertheless, several were keen to explain that their social relations were mixed and that they had friends from other nationalities, including 'Belgians'. For those, boundary-maintenance was often seen as a 'trap' preventing integration, a point highlighted in the literature (Kagné and Martiniello 2001: 41). A participant from Rwanda stated:

> This is a trap for some Rwandans. They do not get out of this thing, they remain prisoners, they don't manage to evolve, in the sense that they don't integrate into the professional life, into anything. Quite a lot of people are like this in Belgium, because there's a big Rwandan community. But when you stay like this, you miss all opportunities, everything goes wrong (interview 5).

This quote establishes a link between the level of diasporic consciousness and the dynamics of integration in the host society. Indeed, boundary maintenance can be either the result of a 'deliberate resistance to assimilation' or 'an unintended consequence of social exclusion' (Brubaker 2005: 6).

Integration and exclusion dynamics

Experiences of discrimination

According to their narratives, the participants can be broadly classified in four

groups depending on their level of professional integration in Belgium: those who were perfectly integrated and never experienced significant discrimination in their professional life (group 1: two participants); those who faced discrimination in the past but were now very well integrated (group 2: three participants); those who still felt discriminated against as their current employment was below their level of qualification but were in a reasonably satisfactory economic situation (group 3: five participants); those who experienced severe difficulties in finding employment in Belgium (group 4: three participants, including one who was never employed in Belgium, and two who had finally found deskilled jobs but did so after several years of unemployment). Eight participants therefore reported deskilling experiences. A Burundian PhD holder who had to retrain as a secondary school teacher after failing to find employment in academia or the private sector stated:

> You have a job, you're happy […]. Now, does your job match your qualifications? I don't think so. People have understood now. Burundians, they say: 'if I have a PhD, I can't be a professor at university, I can't use my PhD'. There are many reorientations in fact. I personally don't know a single Burundian whose job corresponds to his qualifications. Some had to retrain and do something else. Others are unemployed. There's no point to complain about this. Realities are what they are, you have to deal with them (interview 10).

The poor performance of immigrants from non-EU countries in the Belgian labour market is well documented, with an unemployment rate reaching 31.1 percent, compared with 7.5 percent for Belgians (SPF Emploi, Travail et Concertation Sociale 2008: 43-53).[20] Nevertheless, as third countries' immigrants have high rates of naturalisation, it is more meaningful to look at the differences between foreign-born and native-born populations. The figures,

although better than those obtained with the nationality criteria, remain worrying since the unemployment rate of the non-EU born group reaches 23.4 percent, compared with 7 percent for the native Belgians. Non-EU foreign-born are also comparatively more exposed to part-time and temporary employment. Moreover, the Belgian labour market appears to be stratified into different 'ethnic layers'. Sub-Saharan Africans are overrepresented in the bottom wage layers (Vertommen and Martens 2006). Their naturalised counterparts are slightly better off, though not in a favourable position, since employers still regard them as foreigners (Martens and Verhoeven 2006: 273).

Coping strategies: the contradictory dynamics of retraining

The generally lower level of qualification of non-EU immigrants in Belgium does not provide a sufficient explanation for this poor performance: the unemployment rate of the non-EU born highly-skilled reaches 22 percent, compared with 4 percent for the native Belgians. This observation is even less valid for sub-Saharan African immigrants in Belgium due to their generally high level of qualification. Even the lack of recognition of foreign qualifications is not sufficient to explain the situation: the participants had, with one exception, all studied in Belgium.

These individuals are often faced with three options: unemployment, recycling in deskilling jobs, or retraining. When retraining is in itself deskilling (for instance when individuals with advanced degrees retrain as nurses or carers), it can at least be a successful strategy to integrate into the labour market. But when people train at a more advanced level, their strategies appear to be counter-productive: they get older and 'overqualified', which handicaps them further (Gatugu *et al*. 2001: 94). Participants had countless stories of people undertaking one of these two retraining strategies to avoid unemployment, often as a couple. Talking about people who retrained as nurses, a participant from Rwanda poignantly explained:

You get advanced diplomas. You spend five years without finding a job, in the end you say I'm going to do this as well. You don't like it at all, but it's the only sector where you can hope to find a job. Can you imagine? You have studied for five or six years, and you start again in first year, you finish, and you still can't find a job. You start all over again. If you go to university, Africans are the oldest students. This does not mean that they're unable to graduate, it's to find a job, because they think, 'maybe I chose the wrong training' […]. If one of the family members is working, for instance if my wife can make what we need to eat, then I can go back to study. If I find a small job, then she can also go ahead with her studies […]. Most people do this. They say 'if I stay with this diploma without a job for a year, I can't find anything to write on my CV', so you register with a university, and you keep looking for a job. As soon as you get one, you stop studying and you start working […]. Last year, when I started my new job, I was about to register again at university to do another MA, whatever, anything but staying at home. Staying at home with nothing to do is very disturbing. When you have children who go to school, who see you staying home all day, how can you tell them to study? They say 'dad, you've studied but you don't have a job'. It's really hard to explain. I know many people who leave in the morning with a suit and a briefcase and they go for a walk, they come back at five and they pretend that they're working […]. There are lots of stories like this, lots and lots. Among the Rwandans and the Burundians I know, people have too many diplomas, too many… and they're not using them. Unfortunately. It's a waste for Belgium […] and its a waste for Rwanda (interview 9).

Determinants and forms of transnational engagement

As highlighted in the previous sections, most participants shared an orientation to a homeland, although they did not necessarily express it in a collective way. Boundary maintenance also varied among individuals. It is wrong to assume that all these individuals expressed strong diasporic consciousness. The participants' experiences were also contrasted in terms of socio–economic integration, but the majority had been confronted with barriers and discrimination. The way in which these elements interplayed to shape different forms of transnational engagement is the focus of the present section.

Integration and exclusion dynamics

As far as the interplay between integration and transnational engagement is concerned, the findings corroborate neither the contradictory nor the concordant dynamics, in line with the positions taken by De Haas (2005: 1276), Snel *et al*. (2006) and Vertovec (2006: 8-9). On the one side, participants often associated their involvement in their home country or in Africa more generally with social recognition and appreciation of their individual skills and merits (Hansen 2007: 142-144). As explained by a Congolese participant:

In terms of consideration, I'm better off there than here. I mean, when I am lecturing, people find that they have received teaching from somebody who is special, if I can put it that way. Because there are not so many doctors, it's not like here where thousands of people have a PhD. So when you teach, it's like a social recognition that you get. You can see that students are very happy, that the institution is happy to have been able to find someone qualified for this position. And this makes you feel good (interview 6).

A participant from Rwanda similarly stated:

When you are here, no matter the high qualifications you have, you don't get access to the positions for which you have studied. So when you go back to Africa, you make use of your knowledge, and you're proud that what you're giving is visible. Whereas what you're doing here, everything you're doing, nobody sees it. You're just one individual, in a

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two-thousand-person institution, nobody sees you (interview 9).

On the other side, those interviewees who had suffered the highest levels of discrimination had a limited level of transnational engagement apart from their participation in the MIDA programme. In fact, active participation and responsibility-taking in diaspora associations requires a certain level of economic and social capital, as well as leadership qualities (Stocchiero 2008: 16). Individual forms of engagement also require considerable resources. At the same time, highly-integrated individuals who do possess these resources are not necessarily interested in investing them in transnational activities. The complexity of these dynamics partly explains the absence of any clear-cut relationship between the levels of integration and transnational engagement. In the sample, the six participants who were most active in diaspora associations formed part of the two intermediate groups described above in terms of professional integration. They had also been in Belgium for longer, with an average duration of stay of 18 years (compared to 15 for the whole sample). As far as the most integrated individuals are concerned, their orientation to the homeland seemed to take more individual than collective forms of expression.

Collective and individual transnational engagement

All diaspora associations are maintaining the link between 'here and there', but a distinction can nevertheless be made between activities aiming at improving the welfare of diaspora members in the host country and activities promoting the development of 'home'. According to Mercer *et al.*, most diaspora associations fall in the first category. Their activities surround the family life of their members (birth, marriage, death), the exchange of information, the preservation of cultural traditions, and the support to the members in relation with their life in Belgium (2008: 67-73).

This corresponds to the reality described by the participants where membership in this type of associations was dominant. For instance, one Burundian participant from Liège was the president of a one-hundred member association, *La Rencontre Tujajure,* created in 2003 to enable people 'to meet each other, natter away, and exchange information' (interview 2).[21] He was also part of the board of another Burundian cultural association, *Développement Solidaire de la Diaspora en Europe,* chaired by another participant, which existed since one year. Despite its broad title, it focused on gathering members of the Burundian diaspora in Belgium, for instance through the organisation of events (barbecues etc.) that were gathering more than two hundred people.

Nevertheless, two participants were very active in associations directly supporting development at home. One participant was part of a grouping of six paediatricians from the University of Kinshasa who had studied and settled in Belgium. Through their association, *Digue*, created in 1999, they were supporting the paediatric service of their former university by providing documentation, informatics and medical equipment. They were also financing renovation works in the building. A participant from Burundi – the only female participant in the sample – had created in 2005 an association called *Solidarité Contre la Faim au Burundi* in reaction to the chronic hunger affecting some parts of the country. This association was collecting clothes, food and funds (through the organisation of cultural events) for the country.

Nevertheless, Mercer *et al.* highlight that diaspora associations often 'weave together their welfare and development work recasting development as an ongoing process of care and improvement of both people and place in the diaspora and at home' (2008: 68). In fact, many associations have hybrid activities: 'there seem to be no transnational associations that are equally established both "here and there", but rather a transnationalism which is more entrenched "either here or there"' (Stocchiero 2008: 13). The Burundian

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[21] *Rencontre* means 'meeting' in French and *Tujajure* means 'natter' in Kirundi.

female participant was also among the founders of the so-called *Centre de Documentation et de Développement Economique, Social et Culturel du Burundi* that she was chairing. This association was originally mainly focusing on the welfare of Burundians in Belgium through a wide range of activities: ceremonies, festive events and cultural manifestations; support courses for Burundian children; informatics courses for women; courses aiming at familiarising young Burundians with their culture of origin (language, traditional dances etc). Nevertheless, at the time of the interview, the association was reorienting its activities toward small development projects in Burundi in the sectors of health, education and housing. The association was therefore trying to access NGO or public funding. Stocchiero notes similar patterns in Senegalese and Ghanaian associations in Italy with the focus of activities evolving gradually from 'here' to 'there' (2008: 14).

Finally, some of the associations in which participants were active conducted more political activities. One of the participants was the treasurer of *Sima-Kivu*, an association denouncing the plundering of Kivu's mineral resources by Rwanda and other countries, and the exactions committed by the Rwandan army or Congolese militia supported by Rwanda in the province. The association was also gathering funds for the population of Kivu in certain circumstances, for instance after the 2002 eruption of the Nyiragongo volcano. Two participants had also been very active within *IBUKA Mémoire et Justice*,[22] an association gathering survivors of the 1994 Rwanda genocide and concentrating on the perpetuation of the memory of the victims, the prosecution of the criminals and the fight against revisionism. This association also had activities in Rwanda supporting the schooling of orphans from the genocide.

All the associations mentioned above were officially registered in Belgium. Nevertheless, most African diaspora associations in Belgium are *de facto* associations whose existence is precarious and often ephemeral (Kagné 2003: 226-232; Kagné and Martiniello 2001: 34). The very high level of educational and social capital of the participants probably explains the greater formality of their associations. Their functioning nevertheless remained largely informal: for instance, only one of the associations mentioned above had a website.

As noted above, some of the participants who had been involved in the programme did not define themselves in diasporic terms and had no involvement in diaspora associations. Their transnational engagement took more individual forms, such as their participation as experts in the MIDA Great Lakes programme. Apart from MIDA, a few participants were involved in other forms of individual engagement. For instance, a nurse from Burundi had carried out two assignments in Burundi with a Belgian NGO, *Médecins Sans Vacances*,[23] which gathers doctors and nurses who do voluntary work in Africa during their holidays. A Congolese participant had also been involved in another Belgian NGO, *Ingénieurs Sans Frontières*.[24] Interestingly, it was again impossible to identify a clear pattern as far as the interplay between diasporic and more individual engagement with the homeland was concerned: the Burundian nurse was extremely active in Burundian diaspora activities in Belgium, whereas the Congolese participant was not involved at all with diaspora associations in Belgium.

In conclusion, it is essential not to treat diasporas as homogeneous groupings, as is the case in much of the migration–development nexus (Davies 2007: 63; Faist 2008: 36; Vertovec 2006: 8). Interviewees all shared an orientation to a homeland but expressed it in different ways – collective, individual or mixed. Moreover, the collective forms of expression often focused more on life in Belgium than in the home country. No easy conclusion can be drawn as to the interplay between integration and transnational engagement: the latter sometimes increased and sometimes

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[22] <http://www.ibuka.net>

[23] <http://www.azv.be/fr>
[24] <http://www.isf-iai.be/index.php?id=2&L=2>

decreased with the former. What can be said nevertheless is that no matter the degree of motivation produced by exclusion, effective transnational engagement requires resources and access to networks and as such can only be implemented in practice by reasonably well-integrated individuals. It should also be noted that successful cases of transnational engagement, either individual or collective, also impact the integration of migrants in their host country, creating a virtuous circle (Gatugu *et al.* 2001: 105). Several participants mentioned receiving help and financial support from their colleagues or their institutions for their development activities in their own country. When this engagement takes the form of registered associations which seek external funding, the degree of interaction with Belgian public authorities or civil society (NGOs) also increases.

Participants' Perceptions of the Brain Drain

The MIDA concept is based on the assumption that 'diasporas'[25] can be mobilised to mitigate the consequences of the 'brain drain'[26] in developing countries of origin. At the theoretical level, the brain drain controversy has recently been revived by some counter-intuitive theories highlighting the positive impacts of highly-skilled emigration for source countries. After reviewing the main theoretical arguments about the brain drain,[27] this section confronts them with the experiences and perceptions of the individuals involved in the MIDA Great Lakes programme.

The theoretical debate

In the 1960s, a first phase of the brain drain debate opposed the so-called 'internationalist' and 'nationalist' approaches. The former viewed migration as a rational reaction of migrants to international labour market differentials, eventually leading to the correction of disequilibria between sending and receiving economies (Johnson 1968). The latter (Boulding 1968; Patinkin 1968) pointed out the detrimental effects for sending countries through the waste of educational investment and fiscal losses. Skilled emigration was also associated with a loss of positive externalities (particularly in sectors such as health and education). Some authors therefore suggested potential taxation mechanisms on emigrants (Bhagwati and Hamada 1974; Bhagwati 1979).

Prompted by the acceleration of skilled migration and in line with the wider migration and development euphoria, the debate was recently relaunched by the advocates of the 'beneficial brain drain' or 'brain gain' approach. According to them, the possibility of emigration raises the expected returns to education and therefore increases the general level of education. As only a proportion of these individuals eventually emigrate, the total stock of human capital in the source country increases (Mountford 1997; Stark 2004). A couple of empirical studies have found a positive correlation between emigration rates of the highly-skilled and levels of human capital formation in developing source countries at an aggregate level (Beine *et al.* 2001; 2003), leading some to conclude that 'rich countries should not necessarily see themselves as free riding on poor countries' educational efforts' (Docquier and Rapoport 2007: 28).

These theories are in turn contested by authors who argue that the quality of the human capital remaining in the home country is negatively affected by the selectivity of the migration process and that the educational incentives are reduced by the returns brought by low-skilled migration and the risk-aversion of would-be migrants (Kapur and McHale 2005; Schiff 2006).

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[25] As noted above, there is often a terminological slippage between migrants and diasporas in the migration–development nexus. Although this will not be applied to this text to make the reading easier, the term diaspora should most of the time be used with inverted commas to be accurate.

[26] A similar remark applies to the term brain drain, which suggests that the impact of skilled emigration is necessarily detrimental for the countries of origin. It is nevertheless used without inverted commas here.

[27] For in-depth reviews of the theoretical controversies surrounding the brain drain, see for instance Commander *et al.* (2004); Ellerman (2006); OECD (2009: 39-59).

Kapur and McHale also emphasise the higher returns of post-emigration education and the limitations of the educational infrastructure in many source countries. Re-emphasising the traditional concerns in terms of waste of educational investment, fiscal costs and loss of externalities, these authors denounce 'the Panglossian optimism' generally characterising the migration–development nexus (Ellerman 2006: 21).

Brain drain in Burundi, the DRC and Rwanda

The emigration rates of the highly-skilled reach 35 percent in Burundi, 20 percent in Rwanda and nearly 10 percent in the DRC.[28] This immediately attracts our attention to a central issue when analysing the brain drain phenomenon: the difference between absolute and relative figures, the latter being the relevant indicators to assess the intensity of the brain drain for any given country. Although the number of Congolese highly-skilled expatriates is much higher than the number of Rwandan or Burundian in the same situation, the DRC is the least affected by the phenomenon.

At the same time, the three countries also suffer from qualified personnel shortages in their health and education sectors. They are all well below the levels of availability of health workers required to achieve a package of essential health interventions and the Millennium Development Goals (WHO 2006: 9-13; 190-199). In the higher education sector, they are also faced with critical personnel shortages, particularly as far as PhD holders are concerned.[29] Like in many sub-Saharan African countries, the condemnation of the brain drain is prompted by the combination of these two phenomena.

Participants' analysis of the phenomenon

Beneficial or detrimental brain drain?

The narratives of the participants did not corroborate the brain gain theory. Their education decisions and career choices at home did not seem to have been influenced by the possibility of emigration, in line with a recent empirical study looking into the migration motivations of overseas doctors in the UK (Kangasniemi *et al.* 2007). The participants viewed temporary emigration for study as a way to complete their education and achieve their career objectives at home. Moreover, they emigrated precisely because the training they wanted to complete was not available in their countries of origin. Under such circumstances, it is hard to conceive how the perspective of a career abroad in a particular sector, even if it was a central motivation, could increase the level of human capital in the sending country. Nevertheless, the interviewees' experiences did not necessarily support detrimental brain drain approaches. First, it is necessary to avoid oversimplifications about poor sending countries subsidising the rich receiving countries. Six out of the twelve participants who emigrated as students had done so with scholarships from their government, four with scholarships from the Belgian cooperation, one with a private scholarship and one with his own savings: the state of origin does not always bear the costs of training (Skeldon 2009: 9). In Burundi, the DRC and Rwanda the private sector in tertiary education is expanding, with private institutions accounting for respectively 32 percent (Banque Mondiale 2007: 23), 19 percent (World Bank 2005: 101) and 38 percent (World Bank 2004: 33) of the total enrolment.[30] In the case of the DRC, this distinction is in any case rhetorical: since the mid-1980s, 'Congolese households [finance] the bulk of expenditures in public institutions as well' (World Bank 2005: 58).

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[28] OECD database on immigrants and expatriates: <http://www.oecd.org/document/51/0.3343,en_2649_33931_34063091_1_1_1_1,00.html>

[29] Reviews of the education sector in the three countries can be found in Banque Mondiale (2007) and World Bank (2004; 2005).

[30] Data are for the year 2002 for the RDC and Rwanda, and 2004 for Burundi.

Second, the externalities argument also needs to be put in perspective. One academic from the DRC explained:

> Imagine you're a doctor and you're working in a hospital. People come to you but they die. You know what's needed to cure them, but they die anyway because you have no means, you're in a hospital in name only where you can't work because there is no infrastructure for it [...]. So there is this objective to contribute to development, but I can stay in Congo for years and yet not contribute to development because nothing there is at my disposal for me to make such a contribution. I can't do research in Congo because I would need a computer, a printer, money to submit an article and present it in a conference [...] and the state does not give me any of this (interview 6).

This statement corroborates the arguments put forward by Skeldon (2009: 11) and Clemens (2007: 38) about the health sector: in contexts where essential facilities are absent, the greatest externalities are likely to be brought by personnel with a basic level of training rather than highly-trained specialists. Moreover, in such economic conditions, the highly-skilled might actually be unemployed due to the limited absorption capacities of their economies for this type of skill profile (De Haas 2005: 1272). As a matter of fact, both Burundi and Rwanda are criticised by donors for investing too much in higher education given the structure of their economies and not enough in the lower levels of education (Banque Mondiale 2007: 23-33; World Bank 2004: 165-173).

Finally, the migration trajectories of the participants confirmed the need to take into account the rural/urban dichotomy when assessing the validity of the externalities argument. International migrants are usually from an urban background, whether they were born in a city or internally migrated at one point for study or work purposes. Since the greatest needs and the more critical shortages are to be found in rural areas, their departure is likely to have a more limited impact than generally assumed, as

pointed out by Clemens (2007: 4) and Skeldon (2009: 10).

Brain drain as 'a scapegoat for a lack of development'

Participants highlighted that emigration was not the only explanation for the degradation of services or skill loss (Skeldon 2008; 2009). In the DRC, where real public expenditures in higher education in 2002 represented 3 percent of their level in 1980 (World Bank 2005: 49), professors are completing their income with visiting positions in private universities, with these honoraries sometimes making up to almost two-thirds of their income. This over-commitment results in a low quality of courses and a lengthening of academic years (World Bank 2005: 117-118). As a matter of fact, the two interviewees currently working in their home countries as academics, one in Burundi and one in the DRC, were cumulating positions in several institutions. Situations are similar in the health sector: a Congolese health professional reported doing four different jobs at the same time before emigrating to Belgium, juggling between his position in a public hospital, private clinics and the medical centre of a bank. He explained:

> In hospitals in Kinshasa, there are doctors who are there, who are responsible for this or that... But they don't see more than two patients. They have their own medical practice and they tell people to go there, in the private practice, because in the public hospital, there is no material, no equipment, and people are badly paid (interview 2).

Participants also widely reported more negative coping strategies through which academics or health professionals required students or patients to pay for normally free-of-charge services. They also highlighted the importance of complete opting-out from the health and education sectors in favour of more lucrative business or consultancy activities. This is in line with the findings of a number of larger empirical studies reviewed by Clemens (2007: 37) and Skeldon (2008:

10-11), revealing that emigration is not the major cause of skill loss in the health sector.

Brain drain and conflict

The academic literature about brain drain discussed above focuses on voluntary migration. Nevertheless, as noted above, the migration itineraries of the participants could only be understood in the conceptual framework of the 'migration–asylum nexus'. The tragic narratives of many of the interviewees emphasised the central role of conflict in skill shortages in their countries of origin both indirectly, through internal and international forced displacement, and directly through the death toll inflicted in the three countries, which reached a paroxysm in Rwanda. It goes without saying that limiting the discussions about skill shortages in this country to the assessment of the respective merits of beneficial and detrimental brain drain theories without factoring in the impact of the genocide would be an absurdity. As noted by Obura, 'the damage to the higher-education sub-sector was indescribable. The National University of Rwanda (NUR) had been specifically targeted by the perpetrators of the genocide. The toll of deaths among the staff was 153 people; 106 disappeared; 800 fled' (2003: 114).

Participants' solutions to the phenomenon

The solutions put forward by the interviewees were in line with their analysis of the brain drain, emphasising above all the need to tackle the root causes of underdevelopment in source countries.

Improving economic conditions in home countries

Participants saw the improvement of pay and working conditions, as well as the recognition of the value of skills, as essential. They also emphasised the need to address the rural/urban imbalances, as evidenced by this comment from a Burundian nurse:

> The economic problem needs to be addressed in Burundi, either by raising the salaries or by stabilising the prices, because prices continue to go up while salaries don't. What's needed are mechanisms to keep people in the country, and for those who are there, to spread them across the country. What I have noticed is that there is more personnel in Bujumbura, and in the interior, 95 percent of the population is abandoned (interview 1).

Another Burundian nurse pointed out that, in the absence of such an improvement, even the return of the emigrants would not be a solution:

> If I was going back to Burundi, I would be hesitant to work as a nurse because working conditions are deplorable, you're working and you have nothing, and the work you're doing is not appreciated by the state and the society […]. Nurses are badly paid, it's not a recognised and valued profession (interview 7).

Moreover, the same interviewee highlighted the need to adapt training to more pressing needs and demands, a point which was shared by all participants from the health sector:

> What I have noticed with MIDA is that they only look for highly-qualified people, which is wrong […]. There are no nurses, but they're looking for doctors. […] Yesterday, I was talking to [an official] of the *Institut National de Santé Publique*. He was telling me about a project to create a university in the field of public health. That's the mentality you see. They're trying to develop highly-specialised training whereas I told him: 'what's really important for the country is to take all nurses who have completed their studies more than ten years ago and to retrain them all, rather than recruiting academics, people with long studies. That's useless' (interview 7).

In fact, according to the participants, if overall conditions were deplorable, not only was specialised training unable to make a significant impact, but it was also likely to fuel the brain drain, as pointed out by one health professional:

You go to Rwanda, to the University of Butare, and you train doctors, in surgery for instance. You train them, but you don't give them means, you leave and you don't give them anything. [...]. These people are going to act as if they had never been trained. Or you gave them the taste. These people you have trained, they will follow you. I assure you. You qualify a doctor as a specialist in cardiovascular surgery, and you don't give him anything. He's working as a general practitioner in a provincial hospital where there are not even nurses! At the first opportunity, he's going to leave for a country where he can make use of his training in cardiovascular surgery (interview 11).

As far as the role of developed countries is concerned, the issue of compensation did not really come out of the interviews, with one exception. Part of the explanation lies in the fact that only half of the participants had their training abroad paid by their government. Moreover, participants tended to insist more on the responsibility of their home governments in improving the conditions at home than on the policies of host countries. Nevertheless, when asked about possible actions to be taken by receiving countries, interviewees emphasised that development aid should focus on improving working conditions of skilled professionals in developing countries.

Improving security conditions in home countries

The political and security conditions were absolutely central in the migration trajectories of the participants. Without exonerating home-country political leaders from their responsibility, participants often denounced the role played by some developed countries in fuelling conflicts in the region for economic and strategic reasons. They therefore called for a change of certain international practices if the security push factors of the brain drain were to be addressed. As a Rwandan academic put it:

> You're a Head of State, if you don't have a network protecting you, you're a dead man. You're at the mercy of any small rebellion which can be financed because there is an oil well a couple of kilometres away from the capital and you did not give the contract to this one or the other. Because Shell and Elf Aquitaine are competing. And here, on TV screens, we just see people fighting, we're told that Africa is an insecure place. The media don't touch on the hidden stakes [...]. They don't touch on the heart of the problem, this international courtesan system between political leaders, business leaders, financial leaders [...]. But this is something like an organised crime against the sustainable development of Africa (interview 8).

The successful example of Rwanda

Many participants referred to the situation in post-genocide Rwanda to corroborate their point of view. As a result of both the improved economic and security conditions and the policies put in place after the genocide to attract the qualified diaspora, many skilled Rwandans have returned to their country (World Bank 2004: 8). Rwanda has also attracted professionals from several African countries, including Burundi and the DRC. A Rwandan health professional explained:

> Rwanda nowadays is the first economic driver of the region, which pays well, pays regularly in comparison with Burundi, the DRC, all the countries in the region [...]. In the education sector, in the health sector, there are Burundians, there are Congolese. All the Burundian brains, all the Congolese brains, especially from Kivu, they are in Rwanda. It's really visible [...], especially since Burundi has gone through a period of insecurity, whereas security has been improving in Rwanda. In Congo, with the war, the refugees, and so on, it's also insecure... (interview 9).

These accounts correspond to the reality on the ground (World Bank 2004: 147) and draw our attention to the importance of the regional brain drain problem, whereas the phenomenon is too often reduced to the

movements from developing to developed countries. In fact, non-OECD economies are attracting a considerable share of the skilled international migrants nowadays (OECD 2009: 79-83) and sub-Saharan Africa is not isolated from the development of this South-South brain circulation (Adepoju 2004: 1).

From 'the "brain drain" approach' to 'the "diaspora" model'

The participants considered that deplorable conditions in developing home countries were the central cause of highly-skilled emigration, and return could only take place when these conditions improved, as was the case in the recent years in Rwanda. As a result, they strongly opposed restrictive migration policies that would try to curtail migration. 'Stay at home' policies by sending countries are generally unpopular in the literature. But restrictions on the receiving side are frequently advocated through calls for ethical recruitment policies (Connell *et al.* 2007: 1888), particularly in the heath sector which is seen as 'exceptional' (Alkire and Chen 2004: 2).

Not surprisingly, interviewees saw such policies as a denial of their individual freedom to seek a better life for themselves and their families, and condemned their discriminatory nature. They also considered that such policies would be counter-productive. First, they recalled that skilled individuals were often underemployed or unemployed in developing countries. Second, they believed that people would still emigrate but would do so illegally, which would increase the level of brain waste in destination countries without bringing any benefits to source countries. Asked about the merits of such policies, one Burundian academic replied:

> Do you believe in this? Do you really think that if for instance Belgium stopped recruiting Burundians, all Burundian people would go back? [...] If you take 100 Burundians living in Belgium, probably only 5 are using their diploma anyway. Most of them are doing small jobs that do not correspond to their profile. So if Belgium does not

recruit the nurse, she will do something else (interview 10).

This is in line with the arguments of De Haas (2005: 1278-1282) and Skeldon (2008: 19-21). Participants also highlighted that such policies would be inefficient given the impossibility to really curtail migration. A similar assessment has led Bhagwati to plea for 'abandoning the "brain drain" approach' in favour of 'a "diaspora" model' (2003: 101).

In conclusion, the experiences and narratives of the participants did not support either the brain gain or the brain drain approach. The crux of their argument was that skilled personnel had a limited impact in the absence of basic infrastructures. Equally important was the fact that emigration only partially accounted for skill loss and poor quality of services in the health and education sectors. They therefore advocated solutions based on the improvement of economic and security conditions in home countries, and reception conditions in host countries, rather than policies aiming at stemming emigration. This is in line with the body of literature arguing that policies should concentrate on accommodating migration flows in order to maximise their development impact in both receiving and sending countries rather than controlling them.

Participants' Perceptions of Remittances, Diaspora Engagement and Development

The discussion in the previous section has been restricted to brain drain strictly speaking, in terms of its detrimental or beneficial effects on the human capital available in developing source countries. Nevertheless, intermingled phenomena such as the amount and distribution of remittances and the role of diasporas also shape the detrimental or beneficial outcomes of skilled emigration. This section confronts the theoretical approaches of remittances and diaspora engagement with the experiences and perceptions of the interviewees.

The theoretical debate

Remittances as the 'new development mantra'?

The impact of remittances on developing countries is a hotly debated issue. The literature generally acknowledges their poverty alleviation impact and their social protection role 'which reduces vulnerability to shocks' for recipients (Kapur 2003: 15). Nevertheless, remittances do not reach the poorest households, due to the selectivity of migration, particularly international migration, as confirmed by the profiles of the participants. This selectivity also operates at the regional and national level: most remittances are flowing to middle-income rather than low-income countries (De Haas 2007: 10-11; Kapur 2003: 15-17; Kapur and McHale 2005: 135-142; Skeldon 2008: 8), with sub-Saharan Africa receiving the least amount of reported remittances: in 2007, it accounted for US$10.8 billion out of US$239.7 billion in official remittances received by developing countries (World Bank 2008: 59). As far as the DRC, Rwanda and Burundi are concerned, they were receiving in 2004, respectively only US$97 million, US$16 million and US$4 million of the US$6 billion remittances to sub-Saharan Africa in that year, which can be explained by the comparably small size of their diasporas (De Bruyn and Wets 2005: 71).

The assessment of the longer-term 'development' impact of remittances depends on the understanding given to the concept.[31] Historical structural and dependency views denounce the consumptive nature of remittance expenditures as opposed to a more productive use that would foster autonomous forms of development. In the current debate, Ellerman strongly argues that remittance expenditures are essentially sterile for development purposes (2006: 32-35). Others (Carling 2008; De Haas 2007) adopt a less restrictive frame of analysis, based on the temporal and social

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[31] The term 'development', like the term 'diaspora' is often manipulated with limited conceptual caution in the migration–development literature, and would ideally deserve to be used with inverted commas in many cases.

distribution of the benefits of remittances. They highlight that remittances have a multiplier effect and that their use varies over time from the fulfilment of basic needs towards a more 'productive usage'. More fundamentally, they question the relevance of the usual distinction between investment and consumption, as it relates to a purely economic understanding of development. If broader concepts of development are applied, the health and education expenditures of remittances can hardly be considered as developmentally-sterile.

'Beyond remittances': diaspora engagement

Compared with the literature on brain drain and remittances, the diaspora and development literature (Davies 2007; De Haas 2006; Ellerman 2006; Faist 2008; Ionescu 2006; Kapur and McHale 2005: 110-131; Kuznetsov 2006; Newland and Patrick 2004; OECD 2009; Orozco 2007) seems to be rather consensual.

The standard starting point is the observation that a large variety of transnational actors, such as diaspora associations (in particular hometown associations or HTAs) or networks (whether business, professional or scientific) interact with countries of origin. This emphasis on 'migrants as transnational development agents' is a sign of two concomitant trends: the current focus in development thinking on community and civil-society led development and the 'celebration of circulation' in the latest phase of the migration–development nexus (Faist 2008). This interest is also based on a few historical precedents: virtually all publications on this issue focus on the paradigmatic cases of Mexico, in relation with HTAs, and China and India in relation with business, professional and scientific networks. The literature regularly emphasises that the 30 million Overseas Chinese contribute as much as 50 percent of FDI in China or that the Silicon Valley-based Indian diaspora has been instrumental in the recent boom of the Indian software industry. Apart from their direct involvement, diasporas also act as 'reputational intermediaries' contributing to

the economic insertion of home countries in the globalised economy (Kapur and McHale 2005: 116-118). Scientific or epistemic networks focusing on 'joint research projects, information exchange, technology transfers, joint ventures, or training sessions' have also attracted considerable attention (Faist 2008). Faist found evidence of approximately 40 such networks connecting about 35 developing countries in 2003.

Nevertheless, the literature unanimously concludes that diaspora engagement is no panacea. First, diasporas can only benefit source countries if certain pre-requisites are in place: 'the quality of home country organisations appears to be the single most important determinant of diaspora initiatives. Even when diasporas are massive, rich, entrepreneurial and enthusiastic about getting involved [...], they often run up against the binding constraints of home country organisations' (Kuznetsov 2006: 228). Second, there is no automatic convergence of agendas between the diasporas and their home countries, particularly in cases of politically or conflict-driven emigration: 'bitterness, suspicion, reluctance, resentment, stigmatization or discrimination can equally arise from diasporas, populations in the home country or governments' (Ionescu 2006: 56). Third, diasporas are not unitary actors and have conflicting interests. Finally, historical experiences prove that 'successful cases of diaspora engagement are relatively rare but when they do occur, it is not usually through policy intervention' (Kuznetsov 2006: 224).

Moreover, it should be noted that the enthusiastic celebration of the 'diaspora option' through 'circulation' is not only motivated by concerns relating to the development of countries of origin. It also provides a convenient discursive façade for receiving countries to promote temporary forms of migration, particularly for low-skilled workers. As noted by De Haas, the debate 'wrongly tends to equate circular with temporary migration' when 'the key to encouraging circular migration is to give migrants the genuine right and opportunity to migrate again if the return is unsuccessful' (2005: 1282). Bakewell (2008) convincingly argues that the migration and development rhetoric has not eliminated the 'sedentary bias' characterising the theory and practice of development. Circular migration is sometimes seen as the 'current expression of the sedentary bias' (Castles 2008: 3). The policy of the European Union, which closely links development and migration control objectives, is emblematic of this approach, (Bakewell 2008: 1349; Faist 2008: 22, 36-38).

Participants' perspectives on remittances

Remittances and poverty alleviation

The participants' narratives are in line with the main findings of a recent study about remittances in the Great Lakes region (De Bruyn and Wets 2006). Although all participants were sending remittances to their families, the periodicity and amounts involved varied greatly. Some were sending remittances on a monthly basis, others were doing so only in specific circumstances such as family events (baptisms, marriages, funerals etc.). Remittances sent on a regular basis were considered as essential to ensure a decent living for the recipients, covering expenditures such as food, clothing, education and health. In those cases, participants strongly disagreed with the idea that remittances were encouraging dependence or laziness. A Rwandan participant explained, in relation to a question on ethical recruitment:

> Somebody who works here, maybe he's going to earn the minimal wage, maybe €1200-1300 [...]. With this, he is able to put aside maybe €100 that he can send to his family back home. €100 euros in many countries, it's more or less the salary of a doctor [...]. If you prevent these people from being recruited, you're blocking as well the life of thousands of people who are not even here, who did not even come here. Because when I am sending €100 to my family, it provides for the living of quite a number of people. So if you close the doors in this way, you're shutting the

door as well on the life of many people. These emigrants are needed here anyway. Enabling them to work, giving them contracts that enable them to sustain their families back home, I believe that it is very important (interview 5);

The same participant also stated:

Do you think that when I'm giving money to my brother, do you think he's going to say 'great I'm getting money'. No, no, no, no! He needs this money to pay for the schooling of his child, to pay for electricity so that he can help his child with homework in the evening. With the small amount I am sending him, he can invest in something, go ahead. I'm not saying that some people are not living off others, it happens in every society. Here some people never work because they get the social benefits. But it's a minority, maybe 10 percent. People really want to make it through (interview 5).

Remittances and development

While highlighting the importance of remittances for poverty reduction and the livelihood of their families, participants did not think that remittances could bring broader 'development' in their home countries. They pointed out that development could only come out of good governance and significant investments in economic and social infrastructures and that it was precisely the lack of such processes which made remittances necessary. In corrupted and ill-governed states, direct transfers to families were seen as the only way for money to reach the beneficiaries. Moreover, participants insisted that the business climate was simply not conducive for a more 'productive' use of remittances.

Participants' perspectives on diaspora engagement

It should be recalled that the MIDA Great Lakes programme is not strictly speaking a diaspora engagement programme, since participants are involved on an individual basis and do not necessarily express a

diasporic identity. While these types of programme are usually discussed in the literature on diaspora engagement, it is incorrect to label their participants as 'diaspora experts'. Nevertheless, the experiences and perceptions of the participants in this programme reveal interesting elements for the conception and implementation of so-called diaspora engagement policies.

Diaspora engagement: a legitimate but neglected option

Participants fully supported the concept of engagement through circulation: in their eyes, the central quality of the programme was that it enabled them to support their country of origin without threatening their situation in Belgium. This was extremely important for people who often had to struggle to secure their legal status in Belgium. Many participants explained that they were initially unwilling to participate in the programme as they were afraid that it would require them to return permanently or compromise their stay in Belgium. As noted by De Haas, reverse transfers of skills are likely to fail if participation is conditional upon return (2006: 97-98). The fact that the programme also included in the past a small budget to support permanent return added to this confusion. Moreover, participants stressed that the support of permanent return when basic conditions in countries of origin were not met was a waste of resources since people were coming back after one or two years.

Nevertheless, a majority of the participants, particularly among those who had already carried out several missions, was critical of the relatively small budget of the programme and of the financial conditions of the missions. They were well aware of the usual financial practices for international consultants in the development sector and strongly felt that the €50 per diem they were receiving was discriminatory:

Is there a market here in Belgium for immigrants and another one for the natives? Are there different shops, different rents? I'm leaving my family here, I'm asked to go and teach, to help

with this or that project in Africa. I'm going [...] and you would like me to get paid differently from the others? (interview 2).

This was even more the case since they reported facing financial demands from the extended family when travelling back for MIDA missions. Moreover, they felt that this lack of financial recognition negatively impacted the way they were perceived in receiving countries:

> When you're going with your Belgian papers, you should see the gibes you get: 'so you're Belgian?' Very cynically. 'You're Belgian too?'. And they laugh [...]. They're making fun of you because you're Belgian only on paper. You don't show it in your lifestyle, in your appearance. You're coming as an expert but you're far from being the same as a Belgian consultant. One of us has found this expression, and I find it interesting, that we are *des experts aux pieds nus*[32] (interview 4).

For some participants, the concept of 'diaspora expert' was a sort of emotional blackmail to make them accept discriminatory financial conditions. This 'MIDA fatigue' resonates with the observation that intrinsic motivations need to be supported by more extrinsic motivations for any form of involvement in the home country to be sustainable, whether through circulation or return (Ellerman 2006: 38).

The impact of the programme: contrasted experiences

Interviewees were generally cautious about the actual impact of the programme on development. Once again, conditions in home countries appeared to be the central determinant of the contrasted outcomes. One alleged positive outcome of the programme is 'the creation of lasting ties, twinning, and exchanges between national enterprises and institutions of higher education and scientific research in the

countries of origin on the one hand and the host countries on the other' (IOM 2006: 4). In practice, nevertheless, these 'ties' can only be created if there is something to be connected to. One participant reported having asked his hierarchy in Belgium, otherwise very supportive of his engagement through MIDA, about the potential for creating a formal partnership with the university he was supporting in the DRC and getting a negative response due to the absence of any laboratory in the latter. By contrast, one participant from Rwanda who was about to return permanently, was in the process of finalising such an agreement between his Belgian university and his future Rwandan institution. This was possible because a new laboratory had just been constructed in the latter. In this particular case, the programme had played a decisive facilitating and catalyst role:

> MIDA gave me the opportunity to go to Rwanda, even before thinking about a definitive return, to at least gather the information that would enable me to take an informed decision [...]. While I was carrying out my assignment, I was also conducting a reflection on the working environment there, I was conducting a small investigation in fact, interacting with professors, assistants, and getting a sense of the available equipment (interview 8).

Conditions also relate to the attitude of home countries towards the involvement of their diaspora. The potential of migrants' contribution has to be acknowledged and source countries have to develop effective outreach policies (Orozco 2007: 25-26; 32). Once again, Rwanda appears to be the good pupil in the Great Lakes classroom. Whereas Burundi and the DRC do not have articulated policies towards their diasporas (De Bruyn and Wets 2005: 24-25; 42-43), Rwanda has included diaspora engagement in its national development vision, 'Vision 2020' (Republic of Rwanda 2000: 28). The country has created in 2001 a department responsible for the diaspora within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation and organised two 'Rwanda Diaspora Global Conventions' in 2001 and 2005, with the

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[32] 'Barefoot experts'.

first convention giving birth to the 'Rwanda Diaspora Global Network'[33] (De Bruyn and Wets 2005: 59-63). Rwanda is also implementing an IOM-funded project aiming at mapping the Rwandan diaspora in Belgium to assess its development and investment potential.[34]

Nevertheless, even in countries which have a consistent diaspora engagement approach, it is difficult to overcome mistrust and suspicion toward migrants (Gatugu et al. 2001: 114). Around half of the participants reported having faced difficulties in their missions due to the hostility of colleagues or hierarchies. Those who had not been confronted with such difficulties often believed that it was due to the fact that they were returning on a temporary basis and that they would have had problems if they had returned permanently:

> Imagine you graduate from Harvard or something like this. You go back, and there's a minister who has not studied anything so to speak […]. His qualifications are not even comparable. He's your boss. When you have an incompetent boss above you, what do you do? He's trying to downplay you until you disappear […]. Sometimes you go back with a nationalist feeling, you get there, you see what they do to you, you leave again. That's when you like your host country. People have often tried to return by their own means. But when they get there, sometimes they find out that it's worse than what they're trying to escape (interview 9).

As noted by Nyberg-Sørensen, 'in the case of refugee repatriation, but also in the case of labour migration from ethnically or politically divided countries', the barriers to diaspora engagement are also political (2007b: 203). Rwanda is again a case in point, since the country does not really offer professional opportunities for the return of its Hutu migrants, a point that was confirmed by participants from both ethnic backgrounds. Nevertheless, participants reported that

MIDA could once again contribute and reinforce the positive dynamics that existed in a given country:

> When I was there, there was a MIDA expert, a Rwandan pre-1994 who was responsible for State enterprises at the time. He's an engineer, he has nothing to reproach himself. He applied for MIDA and he went there and carried out his assignment. He's not planning to return, but he was able to contribute there. We were lodged together, he was very enthusiastic, we could interact. Maybe 10 years ago, this person wouldn't have been able to go back, but since there's a political evolution... I'm sure that in the next years, more people will be willing to participate in the process which was created in the framework of MIDA or other programmes (interview 8).

To sum up, it is impossible to generalise on the experiences of the participants apart from the conclusion that much depends on conditions in home countries and beneficiary institutions. Moving from the micro (beneficiary institutions) to the macro (national) level, participants were clearly sceptical about the developmental impact of the programme, due to its limited size. They also considered that this type of programme could not replace endogenous development dynamics.

The specificity of diaspora contribution to development

Migrants as cultural mediators

It is often argued that migrants can bring a specific contribution to development based on their capacity to act as 'cultural mediators' between 'different worlds' (Gatugu et al. 2001: 24-25). Nevertheless, this aspect was far from consensual among the participants. Five participants were convinced that the position of 'diaspora experts' made their contribution unique in comparison with other international experts. They insisted on the importance of local contacts and their knowledge of the language and the culture which enabled them to decrypt the 'codes' and transmit

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[33] The RDGN is a non-profit umbrella organization that brings together Rwandan diaspora associations.
[34] <http://mida.belgium.iom.int/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=298&Itemid=211>

their knowledge. One health professional from the DRC explained:

> All the cultural considerations that have a huge impact on people's health, I have them. When I have to give advice, I take into consideration the cultural background of the person in front of me. Is he from the side where inter-family marriage is authorised? Is he from the other side? Is he from the patrilinear or matrilinear side? For the blood donation, am I going to ask the father or the uncle? All of this matters (interview 2).

Two participants expressed a more balanced point of view, recognising the relational advantages of knowing the local culture and languages, but considering that this was not the only determinant of the eventual impact of experts. Another six participants were clearly sceptical. They pointed out that they were considered as different by the local population and that the migration experience had indeed changed them:

> Once you've spent 20 years here, the codes... there are codes you don't know any more. Sometimes, I have more troubles understanding a Rwandan than a French. It's not that I don't speak the language, I know the language very well, I grew up in this culture. But certain aspects of this culture create a distance. And this can impede communication [...]. So the cultural advantage, yes, maybe a little bit, but not so much [...]. I don't think that this is what makes the interest of our contribution. The specificity of our contribution is more profound, it's related to our patriotism and our intellectual disinterestedness (interview 5).

Migrants as promoters of an autonomous and sustainable development

The interviewees were critical of the development aid system and denounced the waste of resources transferred to governments due to bad administration and corruption. They also pointed out that most development aid was tied by donors, starting with the attribution of major infrastructure contracts to their own companies. They denounced what they saw as a waste of resources on international experts' fees that reminded them of the *indemnités de brousse* received by Belgians in the colonial era. Some of them were therefore advocating for the 'horizontalisation' of aid through NGOs or associations of migrants to avoid such leakages, in line with the latest phase of the development discourse praising civil society and grassroots participation.

A good half of the participants were nevertheless advocating for a more radical reconsideration of development. They thought that the specificity of their contribution lay in their authentic commitment to the autonomous development of their countries. Their ideas were in line with those put forward by Ellerman when he opposes 'increased income' and 'increased development' and advocates for a vision of development 'based on developing and diversifying the skills and capabilities of the people in the country so that they can increase their income by adding value (as opposed to merely extracting natural resources) in an autonomous and sustainable way' (2006: 47-48). They thought that aid was not really aiming at fostering development in these terms and that the evolution of their countries toward industrialisation was not in the interests of donors as it would transform African countries into competitors. They praised the development model of Asian emergent countries, who had chosen an essentially aid-free route to development, and believed in solutions based on the development of local skills, good governance and the improvement of business climate in order to attract investments, foster economic growth and create employment. According to them, aid was perpetuating a vicious circle of dependence. One participant explained:

> I would like an electroshock. I would like to be a development advisor in the World Bank or in Obama's government. I would like those institutions to say: 'look, this is what we are giving you,

spreading out over 20 years, financing decreasing each year, every year the share of aid in the budget decreases'. I would be curious to see which mechanisms the African who is Head of State, who is Minister of Finance, or rather Manager of Debts as I call him, I would be curious to see how he's going to stand up and think about how to organise his society [...]. We have always been told about aid, nobody ever speaks about the situation without aid. It's as if the aid institutions were going to exist forever [...]. That's why I am talking about an electroshock. We say 'that's it, there's no more aid [...]. We're going to help those who are performing, who are proposing concrete projects that we can finance and in which we have interests'. We define interests clearly. And you'll see... People will work hard, they're not going to stay seated. And they will find solutions (interview 8).

Their arguments were extremely close to those developed by Moyo (2009). They also agreed with her that aid was in many cases encouraging corruption as conditionality on good governance was not implemented in practice. Although the long-term goal was endogenous development, they believed that development aid efficiency could be improved in the short term by enforcing real conditionality and accountability. They clearly stated that African governments had a primary responsibility in the development failure of their countries:

Responsibilities are shared. African politicians have contributed to their own misfortune [...] because Asia as well has received money from the World Bank, but we could see the result. Where is the result of investments made in Africa? So there is an accountability issue. The African elite was not held accountable. These billions that have been injected, where did they go? The road sector remains to be built, agriculture is still at the subsistence stage, there is no industrial sector, no research infrastructure... (interview 8).

These participants believed that diasporas could make a real difference in this process

as they combined the advanced skills acquired during their stay abroad and a patriotic commitment to the development of their countries, while local elites or international experts were lacking either one or the other. One Rwandan participant explained:

Now we see the difference with the people coming back from abroad. The former diaspora. Rwanda is really a living laboratory for the study of migration. It's the living proof that migration can bring a lot to the country [...]. Why? Because they bring back knowledge and skills. If I'm coming back, I'm not going to work like someone who never saw how things work abroad. It's something else, I will bring another vision. And it's not by locking these people in there that things will go ahead. Never. It's always like this anyway. The United States would be nothing without migrants. Even Europe (interview 5).

Nevertheless, they pointed out that even the reliance on diasporas was a form of external dependence and that the ultimate goal should be a truly endogenous development.

In conclusion, participants' assessment of the impact of remittances and 'diaspora' engagement somehow paralleled each other. According to them, remittances could alleviate poverty in the short term but not promote longer-term 'development'. Similarly, they considered that diaspora engagement, for instance through MIDA missions, could alleviate critical shortages in beneficiary institutions but not initiate nor replace endogenous development dynamics, which they saw as the only sustainable path to development. Ultimately, reliance on diaspora engagement was also considered as a form of external dependence.

Conclusion: Main Findings and Policy Implications

This study has attempted to address a gap in the migration and development literature which, while casting migrants as the new 'heroes of development', has so far singularly ignored their voices, and more

generally the 'perspectives from the South' (Castles and Delgado Wise 2008: 3). The small number of interviews conducted and the limitations of the sample should prevent any excessive generalisation. Nevertheless, the MIDA Great Lakes programme offers an interesting case study for the exploration of skilled migrants' experiences and perceptions of the central themes of the migration–development nexus: brain drain, remittances and diaspora. Moreover, if the assumption that the success of migrants' and diaspora engagement policies relies partly on their capacity to influence their formulation is correct, the findings of this study could potentially bring to light interesting elements for future policy-making and programme-design in this area.

Main findings

A first recurrent question in the literature about migration and development relates to the extent to which the conditions of movement shape the forms and the developmental impact of migration. The complex migration itineraries of the participants resisted clear-cut categorisation such as student/work, voluntary/forced, temporary/permanent migration, or return/circulation. Not surprisingly for the Great Lakes region, security and economic factors were intermingled, confirming the relevance of the concept of the 'migration–asylum nexus', and preventing any schematic conclusion about the respective impact of different types of migration. A majority of participants intended to return at the end of their working life, while a minority – the youngest and those who had the shortest duration of stay in Belgium – was more inclined to return in the short term, highlighting the importance of life-cycle stages. All returns, whether intended or actual, nevertheless, shared a common feature: they were closer to different forms of circulation or 'revolving returns' than to a definite backward movement to a place of origin. Finally, although the migration patterns of women were increasingly diversified and many of them had high levels of education, their involvement in the MIDA Great Lakes programme was extremely marginal.

Another essential question relates to the way in which migrants' identities and the conditions of their stay in host countries impact development in home countries. Once again, the narratives of the participants invited us to avoid any simplification on diasporic identities or engagement. While all participants shared an orientation to a homeland, the expression of this transnational engagement took extremely varied forms – collective, individual or mixed. Moreover, diaspora associations appeared to concentrate more on the welfare of their members in Belgium than on development in home countries. As far as integration and exclusion dynamics are concerned, the study confirmed the intensity of discrimination faced by sub-Saharan Africans in Belgium, despite very high levels of education. Although no automatic relationship between the level of integration in Belgium and transnational engagement in home countries was found, it appeared that the less integrated individuals were the less active transnationally due to their lack of resources.

The last two sections aimed to cover both the factual and the 'meaning' level of the interviews. Besides the basic understanding of their experiences in relation with skilled migration, remittances and diaspora engagement, the aim of the study was to uncover migrants' own perceptions of these phenomena and to confront the policy and academic discourses on these issues with their analyses, as the main actors of these processes. The participants' narratives did not fit with any of the two bodies of theory about the brain drain. They clearly did not conceive their education at home as an investment linked to expected emigration returns, and the prospects of emigrating did not seem to have influenced their education decisions. At the same time, most of them considered emigration as a side issue in terms of understanding the skill shortages and the poor quality of services in the education and health sectors in their countries of origin. They therefore advocated solutions based on the improvement of economic and security conditions in home countries, rather than policies aiming at

stemming emigration. The interviewees' assessment of the impact of remittances and diaspora engagement stressed their usefulness in alleviating poverty and critical shortages in the short term but emphasised that they could by no means replace endogenous dynamics to foster development in the longer term. They could, nevertheless play a powerful catalyst role to reinforce positive forces at work in source countries. Participants also highlighted that the diaspora option, although praised in discourses, was in practice neglected and under-financed, and a certain 'commitment fatigue' was perceptible among many of them.

The main findings of the study can be tentatively summarised in four points. Perhaps the most important finding relates to the complexity of the dynamics at work as far as the migration process and its interactions with development are concerned. A second element which clearly came out of the interviews was the centrality of conditions in home countries, which explained the better performance of Rwanda in recent years compared with the other two countries. These conditions seemed to be the central determinant of the decisions to return or not and played a critical role in shaping the developmental impact of remittances or diaspora engagement. Conditions and policies in host countries also had an impact, but participants gave it less priority than to the improvement of conditions 'at home'. Third, and this is hardly surprising given their position, the interviewees were extremely critical of policies implying any form of coercion, either to prevent emigration or to force engagement or return. They believed that such policies were inefficient and counter-productive. Fourth, they highlighted that international migration was a marginal factor in explaining development and that it was necessary to consider internal and regional migration when assessing the dynamics of skilled migration, remittances or diaspora engagement. Even then, migration was only one of the factors – and not the most important – shaping

development, which was essentially seen as an endogenous process.

Policy implications

In terms of policy implications, the participants' narratives invite us to avoid two symmetrical caveats. Brain drain approaches which hold international migrants responsible for the lack of development in their countries of origin appear to be mistaken. Conversely, migrants are no panacea or miracle solution for development. Both misconceptions result from an overemphasis on the causal power of international migration, in comparison with other factors and have led authors to denounce a 'passing phase' in development thinking (Skeldon 2008). As highlighted by Sriskandarajah, 'the relationship between migration and development is at once incredibly significant but also marginal in many ways' (2005: 28). Nevertheless, this does not mean that we should not try to understand the dynamics of this relationship and support its positive aspects (Nyberg-Sørensen 2007a: 4).

A key lesson in this respect is that policies based on coercion should be avoided, in a world where borders are essentially 'without control' (Bhagwati 2003). Locking people in countries where they have no opportunities, forcing them to return even without prospect, or expecting them to necessarily commit for the development of a country they have left 20 years ago is obviously unethical. But it is also inefficient and counter-productive. Whether ethical recruitment policies are at all 'ethical' is an open question. But in any case, according to the participants, they are inefficient in that they cannot prevent skilled migration but only deteriorate the conditions in which it takes place: they do not resolve the brain drain but they surely amplify the brain waste. Participants also highlighted that return was deemed to fail in the absence of conducive conditions and it is in fact generally acknowledged that such return programmes are 'expensive and difficult to implement' and that 'few have succeeded in encouraging large-scale or sustained return of the highly skilled in particular' (Kapur and

McHale 2005: 201). Finally, skilled migrants' identifications are complex and not always diasporic, and policy should avoid buying into the identity-based discourse of 'awakening' diasporas and fall into a new form of teleology (Brubaker 2005: 13). Moreover, diaspora associations are not necessarily focused on development in source countries. It is therefore wrong to assume that diaspora organisations necessarily constitute a resource that can be channelled for development purposes through adequate support.

The interviewees' narratives therefore invited us to be careful with policies dictated by 'compassionate racism' and to focus less on 'limiting mobility and more on optimising mutual impacts' (Sriskandarajah 2005: 26). De Haas (2005: 1279-1282) and Skeldon (2008: 14-16) similarly invite us to consider accommodationist rather then coercive policies. According to Sriskandarajah 'a crucial guiding principle in optimising the migration–development nexus should be about promoting more real choices for migrants (and potential migrants) rather than limiting choice' (2005: 27). The epigraphs introducing this study and the accounts recorded in its various parts remind us that much remains to be done in this area. This is in line with a conception of development as freedom (Sen 1999) centred on individual well-being. But it is also a question of efficiency in broader development terms at the macro level as other approaches appear to be inefficient.

In order to maximise positive impacts of migration on development, host countries should first of all promote integration, as it is a pre-requisite for effective transnational engagement. The participants' experiences revealed a considerable brain waste which is obviously sub-optimal. Belgium is depriving itself of the valuable labour market contributions of highly-skilled individuals whose education it has actually financed through scholarships in many cases. In these conditions, it would make sense for the country to concentrate on the productive use of the skilled migrants already settled before launching new policies to attract talent (Centre pour l'Egalité des Chances et

la Lutte contre le Racisme 2008: 13; 152-153). Host countries should also adopt more flexible migration policies by facilitating naturalisation and circulation.

From the perspective of the sending countries, maximising the impacts of migration requires to improve economic, social, political and security conditions, in other words to promote development. In fact, the more a country is developed, the more it can benefit from international migration (Sriskandarajah 2005: 29). This attracts our attention to another important misconception in the migration–development nexus, namely the idea that migration can be separated from development, as a kind of isolated factor of causality for development, when it is in fact better understood as being fully part of the development process (Skeldon 2008: 14-16).

In this context, programmes like MIDA can play a catalyst role when conducive conditions are in place, and lead to great individual and collective successes, for instance when an individual assignment by a researcher leads to a durable partnership between two research institutions. But in the absence of such conditions, these programmes can do little more than offering a short-term relief. Any life saved by a 'diaspora' nurse or surgeon, any academic year completed thanks to a 'diaspora' professor is of course worth the effort. But in the longer term, it would be mistaken to believe that development in Burundi, the DCR or Rwanda will come out of MIDA, as highlighted by this concluding interjection from a Rwandan participant:

> Everyone is free to go back or not to go back. I know that many Asian researchers I meet, they're at home. They do PhDs in the US, but since there are opportunities in their country, they go back. They don't go there because they love China. They go there because of China's economic boom. They go there because they want to take advantage of their skills. Migration is not about feelings. It's about giving and getting back. If conditions improve in Africa, the diaspora will be able to

contribute. If there are investments and interventions in the social sector, they will take part in them. But in the long-term where are we going? If MIDA still exists in 50 years, I'm sorry but we will have lost. Do you agree with me? People in MIDA must tell themselves 'we will have succeeded when our mission is closed' (interview 8).

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